R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 012 684 RE 000 198

PROGRAMS FOR THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD.

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PUB DATE JUL 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40 10P.

DESCRIPTORS- *PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS, *PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM, *PRESCHOOL LEARNING, *EARLY EXPERIENCE, *LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, LANGUAGE SKILLS, ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES, PRESCHOOL TEACHERS, GROUP ACTIVITIES, INDIVIDUAL STUDY, DENVER PROGRAM, MONTESSORI APPROACH, O.K. MOORE, HEADSTART PROJECT, PITTSBURGH

THREE ASPECTS OF PROGRAMS AND PROCEDURES FOR THE PRESCHOOL CHILD ARE DISCUSSED--GROWTH IN COMMUNICATING, OPERATIONAL PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS, AND SOME SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES TEACHERS CAN PROVIDE. THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL SETTING, ENVIRONMENT, AND ADULT EXAMPLE ON GROWTH IN COMMUNICATION ARE DESCRIBED. OPERATIONAL PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS--THE DENVER PROGRAM, MONTESSORI APPROACH, RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENT TECHNIQUES PROJECT, AND OPERATION HEADSTART--ARE OUTLINED BRIEFLY. THE EXPERIENCES PRESCHOOL TEACHERS CAN PROVIDE ARE CATEGORIZED AS FREE-PLAY ACTIVITY, STRUCTURED GROUP EXPERIENCES, INDEPENDENT-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES, AND TEACHER-CHILD LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES. REFERENCES ARE CLUED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND COURSE ON READING (22D, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH, JULY 5-15, 1966), AND PUBLISHED IN A REPORT OF THAT MEETING, "PROGRESS AND PROMISE IN READING INSTRUCTION," BY THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15213. (BK)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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A REPORT OF THE TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND COURSE ON READING

Progress and Promise in Reading Instruction

JULY 5-15, 1966

Program of Studies in Reading and Language Arts

School of Education

University of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213

RE 000 198

Programs for the Pre-School Child

by

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One cannot deny that the future of mankind is reflected in the faces of pre-school children. It is obvious that these three to five year olds represent our plenty or poverty, love or hate, fear or courage, despair or hope, and the rural or urban. With which tools or gifts shall we endow these tiny representatives of our nation's diversity? In her delightful book, *The Sense of Wonder,* Rachel Carson made these recommendations:[1]

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength. . . I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is

not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the times to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused — a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown; a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love — then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts, he is not ready to assimilate.

Rachel Carson's message is a meaningful one. Communication processes are nurtured by the sense of wonder and the desire to discover. As early as 1945, Piaget observed that oral language development is dependent upon a child's repeated encounters with objects and events.[2] Therefore, it seems reasonable that pre-school children be provided with opportunities to wonder about and discover themselves as well as a wide variety of other beings, objects, and circumstances. Today's children do need to possess added agility in coping with ideas. This groundwork for thinking must begin in the pre-school years. In further exploring programs and procedures for the pre-school child, the following will be considered:

1. Aspects of a Pre-Schools' Growth in Communicating
2. Pre-School Programs That Are Presently Operational
3. Specific Experiences Pre-School Teachers Can Provide

ASPECTS OF PRE-SCHOOLER'S GROWTH IN COMMUNICATING

The child's language development in the first two years of life can be primarily described as an attempt to understand the overt expression of those around him. According to John and Goldstein, by the age of two years he has developed a speaking vocabulary ranging from three to 300 words that are mainly nouns, verbs, and adjectives.[3] At ages four and five, the child begins to use words that refer to more than a single situation, object, or idea. Complex and compound sentences are also employed by four and five year olds who sometimes talk incessantly. Some children at these ages are able to employ all the basic structures reflected in adult speech.

Thus, in the pre-school years, children engage to varying degrees in the acts of language. An indicated by Smith, three factors dramatically affect the type and degree of communicating done by the pre-schoolers.[4] These include:

1. A social setting for language practice;
2. an environment rich in things, experiences, and ideas; and
3. adult example and assistance.

Other researchers further emphasize the detrimental effects when sensory motor stimulation is lacking or is of limited variety during the pre-school years. More specifically, Hunt suggests that the infant developing in crowded or under restrictive circumstances probably begins to appear less responsive and curious during the second year of life.[5] It is during this period that the child's interests and even locomotion may be curbed as he gets in the way of parents or other members of the household.

Beginning in the third year of life, children need to hear a variety of patterns which they may imitate in their vocal language. Many opportunities for language practice with peers as well as adults are essential. Within any level of our American socio-economic structure, if parents are pre-occupied with personal problems, possess selfish interests, or have other limitations they certainly cannot adequately respond. Therefore, the pre-school can serve to compensate for these and other home environmental conditions.

Yet, one of the basic questions related to pre-school programs is whether or not the early years of child development are a critical and optimal time for acquiring language facility. Most of the past research in an organism's plasticity was conducted with animal subjects. In summarizing this research, Scott indicates that the period of greatest plasticity is during the time of initial socialization.[6] Similar conclusive information about optimal learning periods for humans is unavailable. Deutsch contends that there are probably different critical or optimal learning periods for different processes.[7] Nevertheless, at ages three and four, a child is going through stages of early socialization. It is during this period that he may be motivated to engage in more of the language acts. We have already discovered that some children come to first grade with inadequate or poorly established language patterns. This limitation in aural-oral language facility can contribute to a child's failure in a traditionally structured school system. Perhaps only time the adequacy of traditionally structured school system. Perhaps only time and the adequacy of presently operational pre-school programs will allow for a reasonable re-

PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMS THAT ARE PRESENTLY OPERATIONAL

Current pre-school programs range in quality, type, and social context. At one end of the continuum are those commercially packaged

programs as compared to others completely designed by creative teachers. In addition, whether these pre-school programs are privately or publicly financed, the instructional materials and modes employed are generally similar. Included among those pre-school programs currently operational are the Denver Program, Montessori Approach, Responsive Environment Techniques Project, and Operation Head Start.

As described by Brzeinski, in the fall of 1960 the Denver Public Schools began a longitudinal study of beginning reading instruction.[8] One parallel facet of this project involved determining how effectively parents might prepare their pre-school children for reading. The parents participating were provided with the guidebook, *Preparing Your Child for Reading* by Harrison and McKee. Instruction in the use of this guidebook was also presented to the parents through a series of 16 television programs. Inspection of the guidebook for parents leads one to conclude that most of the lessons were related to the developing of good listening habits, to fostering oral expression, and to emphasizing visual-auditory associations. These language readiness activities do provide a base for essential language learning.

Another pre-school approach receiving attention was initiated in Italy in 1894 by Maria Montessori. The Montessori Approach and materials were prepared with attention to a child's biological and psychological development from ages three to five years.[9] In American Montessori pre-school classes, much emphasis is placed on the use of commercially packaged materials for sensory training and for concept formation. Individual children are given the opportunities to find circumstances that match their interests and stages of development in a structured educational environment. The techniques suggested in the Montessori Method do deserve respect and careful examination. Many features of this program are incorporated in quality pre-school programs.

Programs that feature responsive environment techniques have been developed by O. K. Moore.[10] Directed emphasis on pupils' language growth is structured by the pre-schooler's self-initiated oral dictation. As pupils speak, these spontaneous oral responses are taped. Fragmentary oral language patterns are transcribed, typed for individual pupils, and may serve as reading readiness materials. Another facet of this program involves use of a talking typewriter that lends to observation of pupil behavior while a basic sight vocabulary is presented in a computer programmed fashion. A major expansion of the responsive environment work by Moore will include large scale studies to be carried out in

Chicago and in Greeley, Colorado in cooperation with the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Perhaps the most widely publicized pre-school educational venture, under the auspices of the Economic Opportunity Act, has been titled, Operation Head Start. By February of 1966, this massive federal project included over 561,000 pre-school children and 41,000 pre-school teachers who were each assisted by two adult teacher aids.[11] Included within the program were a variety of pupil learning experiences, provisions for pupil health examinations and treatment, early-childhood teacher training sessions, identification of social services, parent involvement to varying degrees, and a range of volunteer services. The main purpose of this project was to minimize the impact of poverty on the pre-schoolers development. Certainly, the successes of Head Start Projects throughout the country, as well as other pre-school programs and approaches, are directly proportional to an individual program's quality.

SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS CAN PROVIDE

As we continually re-examine our efforts with pre-school children, we seek ways to ready them for all learning. Kinds of experiences we may provide for pre-schoolers can be categorized to include:

1. Child Free Play Activity
2. Structured Group Experiences
3. Independent Directed Activities
4. Teacher-Child Language Experiences

Pre-schoolers learn within a balanced programs designed and adjusted to their individual needs.

1. Child Free Play Activity

Children in the pre-school years do need opportunities to engage in undirected play. Observing children at play has lead investigators such as Hartley, Frank, and Goldensen to classify play functions into the following areas of child need:[12]

a. To imitate adults.

b. To play out real life roles in an intense way.

c. To reflect relationships and experiences.

d. To express pressing needs.

e. To release unacceptable impulses.

f. To reverse roles usually taken.

g. To mirror growth.

h. To work out problems and experiments with solutions.

In meeting these needs children follow avenues for discovery, reasoning, socialization, and emotional equilibrium.

2. Structured Group Experiences

In order for children to extend their techniques for self learning, some structured group experiences are timely. These include activities such as purposeful field trips, class planning of varieties of art projects, and listening to and dramatizing stories. Pre-school children also enjoy playing group games that help set concepts. A favorite is the "Guessing Bag Game". Each day a new object or item is placed in the bag. Each child is encouraged to feel the object without looking and whisper its identity to the teacher. Films, recordings, slides, and filmstrips are additional media for helping children acquire concepts.

Aspects of the language experience dictation may serve in group centered activities. As pupils are encouraged to orally supply labels for their products, the teacher records these in manuscript print retaining pupil's language patterns. Naturally, children begin to associate printed words with their sounds. Picture books may also serve to elicit group descriptions. An example are the Holt-Rinehart-Winston "Kinder-Owl Series" designed in view of the interests and concepts indispensable to the pre-schooler. These are just a few of the many kinds of things creative teachers devise and employ.

3. Independent Directed Activities

These activities are as endless as the ideas teachers may have. Some examples include: hunting for categories of animals in old magazines; looking for pictures of people that depict emotions such as happiness or anger; illustrating an imaginative idea or object with paints, crayons-or paper bags; or mounting a collection of leaves, grass and flowers.

If available, the tape recorder can serve, too, as an excellent tool for encouraging the practice of language patterns. Individual children enjoy repeating a catchy poem recorded by the teacher. Other pupil practical tasks should include learning to wash one's hands, clean one's shoes, or arrange belongings neatly.

4. Teacher-Child Language Experiences

Every pre-school child needs to feel that he is genuinely accepted and respected by his teacher. Through a one-to-one relationship, each child feels he is important to her. During these sessions, teachers find excellent opportunities to elicit from children precise labels for objects discussed. The pre-schooler should be encouraged to keep a personal folder that contains individually dictated stories recorded during conference sessions with his teacher. These may or may not be shared with others as he desires. Perhaps, too, the individual conference gives each child an opportunity to know his teacher a little better. For regardless of the quality or quantity of activities, she personally holds the single crucial key to his successes and failures.

In full view of the aspects affecting pre-school growth, the types of operational programs, and a quest for that never ending list of meaningful language activities, one may generally describe the pre-school programs as catalystic agents in every child's probable learning successes. Dedicated to making environmental compensations and to eliciting each child's sense of wonder, these programs are justified by their apparent results.

FOOTNOTES

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